ORAL LITERATURE PROJECT

ANALYSING TIV WORK SONGS IN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

BY

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DECLARATION

I, **ORKUMA TERSUGH MOSES** in the department of English and Literary Studies with the matriculation number **22/031144151** hereby declare that this Oral Literature project entitled "**ANALYSING TIV WORK SONGS IN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES"** is an original research carried out and written by me. It is a record of my research work and has not been presented in my previous publication.

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ORKUMA TERSUGH MOSES

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project was carried out by **ORKUMA, TERSUGH MOSES** under the supervision of **MR. DOMINIC OKPENE**, Department of English and Literary Studies.

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MR. DOMINIC OKPENE **DR. Jayne Ese Owan**

Date_____ **Date_____**

(Project Supervisor) ***(Project Co-ordinator)***

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my beloved parents Mr. and Mrs. Felix Orkuma for their financial and moral support to me, to every member of my family and well wishers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Almighty God for the gift of life, wisdom and strength granted to me throughout the course of this project.

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ABTRACT

This work is titled "**Analysing Tiv Work Songs in Agricultural Practices."** This research examines the enduring tradition of Tiv agricultural work songs as practised in Ukum-Mbawandan, Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State. Anchored in the agrarian life of the Tiv people, these songs historically functioned as tools of motivation, education, spiritual reflection, and communal bonding during farming activities, particularly yam cultivation. The study focuses on their poetic structure, cultural significance, and ongoing relevance in a rapidly modernising society.

Data was gathered through a combination of library research and qualitative fieldwork. The field research involved participant observation during farming activities, interviews with local farmers and video recordings of live song performances, allowing for an authentic and context-rich understanding of the songs in their natural environment.

Ethnomethodology served as the guiding theoretical framework, valuing the Tiv people's own interpretations, expressions, and cultural knowledge as central to the study. This approach allowed the research to remain rooted in the lived experiences of the community and avoid imposing external analytical categories.

The study found that Tiv agricultural work songs are not only functional but are deeply artistic, employing a wide range of literary devices such as repetition, apostrophe, symbolism, irony and personification. The songs are categorised broadly into motivational and satirical types, reflecting a diversity of themes such as communal labour, spiritual warfare, environmental care, and moral instruction. Linguistic features such as rhythm, syntax, phonology, and oral-aesthetic markers reveal a rich oral tradition that remains adaptable and expressive despite the pressures of modernisation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TIV PEOPLE

The Tiv people are an ethnic group in central Nigeria, primarily in Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa States. Their history, like that of many African groups, is rooted in oral traditions and linguistics analysis.

There are numerous perspectives on the origin of Tiv people. However, In agreement with Alfred Akawe Torkula that: “Although different views are held about the Tiv origin, the version that commands popularity and currency is that which traces their origin to the Bantu people who once inhabited the Central Africa Continent, in the Shaba area of the present Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).” (1)

Historical and linguistic evidence suggest that the Tiv were part of the great Bantu migrants. During this period, Bantu-speaking groups moved across Africa in search of fertile land and better living conditions. The Tiv, a distinct branch of these migrations, are believed to have travelled from the Congo Basin through northern Cameroon before settling in their present location in central Nigeria.

By the 16th century, the Tiv people had established themselves in the Benue Valley, a region with fertile land suitable for farming. Oral traditions suggest that the first Tiv settlements were in Swem

Karagbe, a mystical location believed to be the cradle of the Tiv people before their dispersal across the Benue region.

Unlike many centralized African kingdoms, the Tiv traditionally lived in a decentralized society; hence, every clan or kindred was administered by the eldest man, called “Orya”. They were amongst the first inhabitants of the Benue Valley before other tribes finally migrated to join them. Due to their peaceful disposition and dispersed nature of living, they posed no threat to new migrants to the region who cohabited with them until the coming of the Europeans.

By the 18th century, the British colonial administration encountered the Tiv, leading to conflicts due to the Tiv’s resistance against indirect rule. Over time, British influence introduced changes in governance, which prompted the Tiv to clamor for and install a king (Tor Tiv) in the 1940s, altering traditional Tiv society.

Today, the Tiv people are one of Nigeria’s largest ethnic groups, known for their rich cultural heritage, including swange dance, poetry and agricultural expertise. Their historical journey from Central Africa to Nigeria continues to shape their identity and social structure.

1.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIV AGRICULTURAL WORK SONGS

Tiv agricultural work songs are traditional songs sung by the Tiv people of Benue state. These songs are deeply connected to their agricultural identity. Tiv agricultural work songs date back to pre-colonial times and were primarily used during farming activities.

Since the Tiv people rely heavily on agriculture, especially yam farming (tom sule), these songs helped coordinate efforts, boost morale and maintain rhythm in collective labour.

These songs were used to keep workers on the farm energized and reduce fatigue during long hours of work.

Also, the rhythmic and melodic nature of these songs made labour more enjoyable.

Furthermore, some of these work songs had religious or ancestral elements, invoking blessings for a good harvest.

However, with colonial rule and modernization, Tiv agricultural work songs evolved. The introduction of Western education, Christianity and mechanized farming led to a reduction in communal labour practices, affecting the tradition of work songs. However, some have been adapted into contemporary Tiv music and are still performed during social gatherings.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This research seeks to document and analyse Tiv agricultural work songs. By focusing on their literary forms and poetic devices, this study will uncover the deeper functions these songs serve in Tiv society. It will also provide insights into how these oral performances reflect the thoughts, emotions and worldviews of the Tiv people. This study will not only contribute to the documentation of Tiv oral

traditions but also serve as a valuable resource for scholars and the Tiv community itself.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to document and analyse Tiv agricultural work songs, focusing on their literary forms, poetic techniques and cultural functions. Specifically, the study aims to:

i. Identify and document Tiv work songs that are sung during agricultural activities.
ii. Analyse the literary and poetic services used in Tiv agricultural work songs.
iii. Examine the cultural and social functions of these songs in Tiv society, including their roles in motivation, communal bonding and cultural education.
iv. Explore the themes and meanings embedded in Tiv work songs particularly their reflection on labour, history and identity.
v. Investigate the impact of modernization on Tiv work songs, assessing how they have evolved or declined over time.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research systematically studies agricultural work songs, making it highly significant for various fields:

(i) By documenting Tiv agricultural works, this study helps safeguard an important aspect of Tiv cultural heritage that may otherwise be lost due to modernisation and changing labour practices.

(ii) The study expands the understanding of African oral literature by highlighting the poetic and artistic qualities of agricultural work songs, which have often been overlooked.

(iii) The study can serve as a resource for scholars, students and cultural resources interested in African oral traditions and literature.

(iv) By analyzing the role of music in labour, the study contributes to broader discussions on how songs influence productivity and morale in traditional African societies.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on Tiv agricultural work songs in Ukum-Mbawandan, Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State, which is selected to ensure broad representation. The research covers:

i. Different Tiv agricultural work songs sung by farmers during farming activities.

ii. Poetic and literary analysis of the songs, including their structure, themes and stylistic elements.

iii. Cultural and social functions of the songs in Tiv labour settings.

The study does not focus on other genres of Tiv oral literature, such as folktales or praise poetry, unless they directly relate to agricultural work songs.

Additionally, while it examines how agricultural work songs function in traditional and contemporary settings, it does not explore their potential commercialization or adaptation into modern music.

By defining these parameters, this study ensures a focused, in-depth exploration of Tiv agricultural work songs, providing a solid foundation for future research in this area.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To ensure a thorough and original exploration of Tiv agricultural work songs, this study employed a combination of library research and field research using qualitative methods.

Library Research

The library research involved reviewing literary works on Tiv oral traditions, labour practices and song cultures. While existing studies on Tiv folklore provided some background, this research breaks new ground by specifically focusing on songs sung during agricultural activities.

Field Research

The research was conducted in Ukum-Mbawandan, Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State, chosen to represent different parts of Tivland.

Data collection was conducted among farmers who commonly use these agricultural work songs. The various data collection techniques used include:

i. Participant Observation: The researcher observed and recorded agricultural work songs in real-life agricultural settings, noting the rhythm, structure and performance context.
ii. Interviews: Interviews were conducted with farmers (song performers).
iii. Visual Recordings: Since agricultural work songs are best understood through performance, video recordings were made to preserve their original delivery.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided by ethnomethodology, a theory developed by Harold Garfinkel in 1954, an American sociologist and ethnomethodologist. The theory advocates for the supremacy and pre-eminence of the principles and understanding of the cultural setting under study. By this, it implies that the understanding and methods of appreciating a particular art by members of the social setting is more valid than whatever theory is brought from outside that setting. This theory seeks for proper understanding of the people and culture under study.

In this study, ethnomethodology is particularly significant because Tiv agricultural work songs are not merely songs in the

aesthetic sense; they are performative acts rooted in the daily experiences, values and social dynamics of Tiv agrarian life. These songs are composed, performed and transmitted in real-time, often during communal farming activities. They serve as social tools through which farmers express a wide range of sentiments; from joy and humour to social criticism, moral instruction and collective solidarity. As such, they form a dynamic part of Tiv oral tradition and cultural expression.

By employing ethnomethodology, this research places emphasis on how Tiv people themselves understand, create, and use these songs within their farming context. The aim is not merely to analyse the songs as literary or musical texts, but to explore the cultural processes and social meanings embedded in their performance. Attention is given to the contexts in which the songs are sung, the occasions that inspire their composition, the forms of language used, and the community's response to them. The Tiv understanding of the purpose, appropriateness, and impact of these songs is central to the inquiry.

Furthermore, the theory allows the researcher to acknowledge and respect the internal logic, rhythm, and function of Tiv agricultural songs without reducing them to predetermined theoretical categories. It foregrounds the voices of the people, their interpretations, their expressions, and their everyday wisdom. In so doing, the study avoids

cultural imposition and remains faithful to the lived experiences of the Tiv farming community. Ethnomethodology, therefore, provides a fitting framework for an enquiry that seeks to preserve the authenticity of Tiv cultural expression while also offering critical insights into the meanings these songs carry for those who live and work with them daily.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

1.1 REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP ON WORK SONGS

Different scholars have studied work songs in various contexts, particularly in relation to labour. The researcher has consulted a range of sources, including journals, books, articles, etc. that focused primarily on role of work songs. However, these studies still leave a lacuna for further research into their literary qualities.

Finnegan Ruth, one of the foundational studies of work songs, provides an early perspective on work songs, emphasising that they are shaped more by the rhythm of labour than by their audience. She argues that the occasion of work influences the song’s structure, making it dependent on the physical task rather than external listeners. This perspective aligns with the understanding that work songs are deeply intertwined with labour activities and serve a functional purpose beyond mere entertainment (231).

R. C. Okafor's examination of music in Nigerian education systems sheds light on the pedagogical functions of work songs. He argues that these songs are instrumental in imparting societal norms and values, particularly in rural settings where formal education may be limited. By embedding instructions and moral lessons within songs, communities can effectively transmit knowledge and maintain social cohesion (59-68).

John Odo Onu and Priscilla Ebere Ugwuoke provide one of the most detailed linguistic and structural analyses of work songs. Though focused on the Igbo, their findings offer broader applicability. They identify key features such as rhythmic call-and-response patterns, tonal variation and poetic structure, which help regulate the pace of labour, particularly in communal farm settings (215-218). More than just musical entertainment, these songs serve to uplift workers' spirits, enforce discipline, and reinforce group solidarity. The authors

also highlight the moral and educational undertones embedded in the lyrics, showing how work songs function as tools for both motivation and instruction (221).

Sanortey Dikpetey Thomas expands the discussion by positioning songs as a crucial means of communication. He asserts that songs help identify key figures in society and preserve their legacies while also shedding light on the cultural practices and social norms. This viewpoint suggests that work songs, beyond their rhythmic and motivational roles, serve as historical records and conveyors of communal values (121-131).

Frank Gunderson gives a pivotal contribution to the scholarship on African work songs. In this extensive study, Gunderson examines the musical practices of the Sukuma people, detailing how labour songs accompany a range of agricultural and social activities. These songs serve multiple purposes: they regulate physical effort, provide emotional release, and act as social commentary (102–198). Gunderson's approach, combining field recordings, interviews, and musical analysis demonstrates how work songs mediate community cohesion, resistance to exploitation, and cultural pride. Though the geographical focus is Tanzania, the findings resonate with labour song traditions across African farming societies.

Based on these scholarly perspectives, I therefore see work songs in Tiv agricultural practices as rhythmic oral expressions performed during labour to enhance productivity, coordination and motivation. These songs are not merely functional tools but also cultural artifacts that serve multiple roles within the community.

2.2 REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP ON TIV WORK SONGS IN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Within the Tiv culture, focused investigations into Tiv musical traditions have contributed significantly to understanding how work songs function in agricultural life. Important sources offer distinct but complementary perspectives on the cultural, communicative and performative roles of Tiv work songs.

Kur and Iwokwagh, in their article “The Information Value of Traditional Tiv Music and Dance in the Age of Modern Communication Technologies,” argue that Tiv traditional music, including agricultural work songs retains a communicative value even in contemporary society. They contend that these songs, often embedded in farming and communal work, act as cultural channels through which information is passed on, particularly in rural settings (102). The authors highlight that Tiv songs are rich with idioms, proverbs, and rhythmic patterns that not only motivate labourers but also educate younger members of the community about Tiv history, moral values,

and ecological knowledge. They argue persuasively that despite technological change, such musical forms remain deeply valued for their educational, entertaining, and moral influence during communal agricultural work (106-107).

Similarly, in his chapter “Performance in Tiv Oral Poetry,” Iyorwuese Hagher examines how Tiv oral performance, including work songs is embedded within the rhythms of agricultural life. Drawing upon field observations, Hagher describes the physicality of Tiv performance, where songs are not merely sung but are dramatised through movement and repetition, aligning closely with the bodily labour involved in farming (40). His ethnographic detail reveals that Tiv farming songs are laden with metaphors and collective refrains that instruct workers, mark time, and alleviate exhaustion. One striking example is the use of alternating verses between lead singers and chorus, which reinforces teamwork and enhances productivity (43-44).

Chia Innocent Igbadoo, Aondoseer Abeh and Adijatu Iyabo Lawal discuss how communal labour practices, including the use of work songs, influence indigenous forms of management. While not solely focused on music, the article recognises the organisational function of work songs; how they help structure tasks, maintain rhythm, and ensure synchronisation among workers (45-48). This insight repositions work songs within a proto-managerial framework,

viewing them as tools of indigenous governance and collective coordination.

These scholars collectively illuminate the multidimensionality of Tiv agricultural work songs as cultural texts, performative acts and managerial systems. Rather than being marginal cultural expressions, they should be recognised as central mechanisms through which the Tiv negotiate identity, productivity, and continuity in a changing world.

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CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSING TIV WORK SONGS IN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

3.1 Performance

Performance lies at the heart of Tiv agricultural work songs. These songs are not merely sung for entertainment; they are embedded in the very soul of Tiv farming life. When Tiv farmers gather in the early hours of the morning, the air thick with the scent of dew and freshly turned earth, the work songs begin almost

instinctively. A lead singer initiates the song, setting the pace and mood, while others respond in chorus. This call-and-response structure creates a communal rhythm that guides the collective labour.

The performance of work songs during farming activities transforms arduous labour into a lively, almost festive event. The songs synchronise the movements of the workers, ensuring that tasks such as hoeing, planting or weeding are done in harmony. More importantly, the songs serve to uplift the spirit, counteracting the exhaustion and monotony that accompany prolonged physical work.

Performance is not static; it is dynamic and sensitive to the working environment. When spirits wane under the unforgiving afternoon sun, the tempo and intensity of the songs increase, injecting renewed energy into the labour force. At times, the performances may also include physical movements; light dancing steps or coordinated hoe strikes, making the farm resemble a stage where the dignity of work is celebrated through sound and motion.

In this context, Tiv agricultural work songs are not just musical performances; they are deeply ritualistic enactments of communal survival and cohesion.

3.2 Classification of Tiv Agricultural Work Songs

Tiv agricultural work songs can be classified based on their function, form, and thematic focus during farm labour. Two major types emerge from field observations:

Motivational Songs

These songs are crafted to inspire farmers during laborious tasks. Lyrics focus on perseverance, collective strength, and the honour found in hard work. Motivational songs are typically fast-paced, ensuring that energy levels remain high even during the most strenuous activities. Example of such song includes:

Song 1

TIV VERSION

KPORON KYUA, YESU

Mter:

Kporon kyua, Yesu

Ter Yesu wam

Kporon kyua

Va zinda ormer

A yen sha

Mlumun:

Kporon kyua, Yesu

Ter Yesu wam

Kporon kyua

Va zinda diabolo

A na se ian

ENGLISH VERSION

DRAW NEARER, JESUS

Solo:

Draw nearer, Jesus

My lord, Jesus

Draw nearer, Jesus

And chase the foe away

Let him flee afar

Chorus:

Draw nearer, Jesus

My lord, Jesus

Drive out the evil one

That he may yield us space.

Satirical Songs

In typical Tiv fashion, humour finds its way into the fields. Satirical songs are composed to tease fellow workers, mock laziness, or highlight societal issues. These songs not only amuse but also enforce social norms, subtly reminding workers of acceptable behaviour without direct confrontation. Examples of such songs include:

Song 2

TIV VERSION

TOHO NANDEN KA KWAGH DEDOO GA

Ityô yam Tiv ooo

Me kaa ne zege kwagh u toho nanden u va amin ken tar Tiv ne

Toho nanden ka kwagh dedoo ga

Yange genev la tsôô akoo kôr

Mbayev tso ve nande toho or ve

Toho yughul kpa ishôso I ve soo la Lu ker ga

Kpa or nande vindi vindi

ENGLISH VERSION

BUSH BURNING IS NOT A GOOD THING

My kinsmen Tiv ooo

l tell you a great thing that Bush burning has brought

Bush burning is not a good thing

One day, children craved for meat

So they set bush ablaze so as to catch games

Bush burned but the games they desired were not there.

But they burnt completely

Song 3

TIV VERSION

“WAN MBAIOR”

Hye, ahye!

Hye, hyeee!

Wan Mbaior ngu kwase ga kpa

Una yalen ken tyev

Man ngu duun ahi ga yo

Or Mbayev de un

Ahura tom

ENGLISH VERSION

THE MAIDEN OF MBAIOR

Oh, oh!

Oh, ooh!

The maiden of Mbaior may not shine as a wife

But if she treads the soil

And though she gathers no groundnuts

Suitor of Mbayev, do not cast her aside

Let her remain and tend the field

3.3 Tiv Agricultural Work Songs and their Literary Devices

Tiv agricultural work songs are steeped in rich literary artistry, revealing a tradition that is as much about poetry as it is about music. Several devices are commonly employed:

Song 1: Draw Nearer, Jesus

Literary Devices

Apostrophe:

The song is a direct address to Jesus; a figure not physically present, which is a classic use of apostrophe in literature. It expresses intimacy, devotion and dependence on divine presence.

Alliteration:

“Kporon kyua” (Draw nearer) - the repetition of the ‘k’ sound enhances the prayerful, rhythmic tone.

Imagery:

The line “va zinda diabolo” (drive out the evil one) conjures a spiritual battlefield; this is not just a song of worship, but of protection, warfare, and intervention.

Symbolism:

“Yesu” (Jesus) represents divine protection; “diabolo” (*the foe* or *evil one*) symbolises hardship, temptation, or danger. This is typical of Christian spirituals, where physical enemies often stand for moral or spiritual trials.

Repetition

The repeated plea “kporon kyua, Yesu” (Draw nearer, Jesus) increases emotional intensity and reinforces dependence on divine intervention.

In oral traditions, repetition also aids memorability and community participation.

Song 2: "*Toho Nanden Ka Kwagh Dedoo Ga" (*Bush Burning is Not a Good Thing)

Literary Devices

Allegory:

This entire song can be read as an allegory; the act of burning bush to find meat represents short-sighted actions with destructive consequences.

Imagery:

Vivid phrases like "*ve nande toho"* (set bush ablaze) and "*nande vindi vindi* " (they burnt completely) evoke clear, powerful visual images that make the warning more impactful.

Irony:

The intended outcome (meat) is not achieved, yet irreversible damage occurs. This is situational irony; a contrast between expectation and reality, which strengthens the moral lesson.

Parallelism:

The repetition of "*Toho nanden ka kwagh dedoo ga"* (Bush burning is not a good thing) is a form of parallelism. It reinforces the message and anchors the song's theme.

Song 3: "Wan Mbaior" (The Maiden of Mbaior)

Literary Devices

Metaphor:

"Wan Mbaior ngu kwase ga kpa " (May not shine as a wife) uses *shine* metaphorically to represent qualities traditionally expected of a 'good' wife; beauty, domestic skills, or social standing. The metaphor gives emotional depth, showing how worth is often judged by superficial standards.

Symbolism:

"Wan Mbaior" (The *maiden)*, "ahi" (*groundnuts)*, and "tom" (*field)* are symbolic. The "tom" (*field)* represents productive labour or agricultural value, while "duun ahi ga yo" (*gathering no groundnuts)* symbolizes the absence of material yield or fertility. Still, her ability to "ahura tom" (tread the soil) means she contributes in other, perhaps less appreciated ways.

Repetition

The phrase "hye, ahye!" (oh, oh!) is repeated in the song.

3.4 Themes in Tiv Agricultural Work Songs

The Tiv agricultural work songs presented are rich in thematic content, drawing from the lived experiences, ethical teachings, communal values, and cosmological beliefs of the Tiv people. As oral traditions deeply embedded in everyday life, these songs serve not only as entertainment or artistic expression but also as vehicles of cultural instruction, moral guidance, and spiritual supplication**.** Through their performance in farming fields, communal gatherings, and religious contexts, the songs communicate complex themes in a deceptively simple and lyrical form.

I. The Value of Labour and the Redefinition of Worth

A dominant theme running through the songs is the value of labour, especially as it relates to the status and dignity of individuals within the community. In traditional Tiv society, identity is often strongly tied to productivity, particularly in an agrarian context. This is evident in the portrayal of a young woman who, though not considered ideal for marriage due to certain shortcomings, is defended on the grounds of her hard work in the fields. Her physical contribution to agricultural labour offers an alternative metric of value, challenging the social norms that assess women primarily through beauty, fertility, or domestic competence.

This thematic concern with redefining worth is both progressive and practical, revealing a social ethic that prioritises survival and community welfare over rigid gender expectations. It speaks to the Tiv worldview, where the land is central to life, and those who commit to its cultivation are accorded honour, regardless of gender. The song, in this light, becomes a subtle critique of superficial standards and a call for recognising non-traditional forms of contribution.

II. Environmental Consciousness and Communal Responsibility

Another compelling theme emerges in the moral reflection on bush burning. This song explores the consequences of environmentally destructive practices; a message that resonates profoundly in today's discussions on climate change and sustainable agriculture. The song recounts a scenario where children, driven by a craving for meat, set fire to the bush in the hope of catching wild animals. However, the animals are absent, and the bush, once rich in resources, is irreversibly destroyed.

Here, the theme of short-term desire versus long-term consequence is central. The act of burning the bush symbolises impulsive decisions driven by immediate gratification, while the destruction of the land symbolises the permanent loss of natural wealth and balance. This story functions not just as a literal account but also as an allegory for various human failings; be it poor

leadership, irresponsible development, or cultural decay. The song warns against recklessness and lack of foresight**,** urging instead for a communal ethic that safeguards the land for future generations.

Additionally, this song reflects a deep ecological awareness that predates modern environmental discourse. It reveals that Tiv oral literature is not only reflective but also prescriptive, offering environmental lessons through culturally resonant narratives. It also touches on the innocence of childhood and how even naive actions can lead to serious consequences, reinforcing the role of elders and community structures in guiding youth behaviour.

III. Faith, Spiritual Warfare and Communal Redemption

The spiritual song directed to Jesus introduces a distinctly religious dimension to the themes explored. This song is a prayerful plea for divine presence, intervention, and protection. It encapsulates a theme that is recurrent in many African religious expressions; the nearness of the divine in human affairs. The call for Jesus to “draw nearer” and “chase the foe away” reflects a worldview in which spiritual forces are not abstract but tangible realities influencing health, safety, and prosperity.

Themes of spiritual warfare and deliverance from evil dominate the song. The “evil one” is not merely a Christian demon; it is a symbolic representation of all that threatens communal harmony; be it

sickness, misfortune, enemies, or moral failure. By invoking Jesus as both protector and conqueror, the song reassures the community of a divine ally in their struggles.

Importantly, the song is not only about personal salvation. Though it uses the singular form (“my Lord”), it ends with a communal aspiration: that “he may yield us space”. This expresses a core African theological theme; that the individual and the community are spiritually intertwined**.** Deliverance is not fully meaningful unless it includes the collective.

Furthermore, this song reflects the synthesis between Tiv culture and Christianity**,** showing how local musical traditions adapt and absorb Christian messages. It highlights a theme of spiritual resilience, where songs become tools for emotional healing, resistance against unseen forces, and affirmation of faith in times of uncertainty.

IV. Oral Literature as Cultural Memory and Moral Compass

Running through all the songs is a final unifying theme: the role of oral literature as a custodian of cultural memory and a moral compass. Whether in the form of social commentary, environmental caution, or spiritual petition, these songs do more than entertain. They encode wisdom, offer moral instruction, critique societal failings, and provide hope. In doing so, they reflect the Tiv philosophy of life**,**

which values the land, honours the divine, and sees each person as part of a larger social and spiritual fabric.

3.5 Linguistic Features in Tiv Agricultural Work Songs

The linguistic features of the Tiv agricultural work songs under examination offer a rich tapestry of poetic strategies, cultural codes, syntactic stylisations, and phonological patterns that collectively enhance the songs' communicative power. These features are crucial in oral literature, where the spoken word is not only a medium of art but a living instrument of tradition, teaching, and emotional connection. By analysing the linguistic elements in these songs, we gain insight into both the aesthetics and the social functions of Tiv verbal art.

i. Repetition and Rhythm

One of the first noticeable linguistic features is the presence of repetition. Repetition is a dominant linguistic device across the songs. It serves various stylistic and functional purposes:

Emphasis and Emotional Intensity: Phrases like *"Hye, ahye! Hye, hyeee!"* or *"Kporon kyua, Yesu"* are repeated to express urgency, reverence, or lament. In oral performance, such repetition creates a rhythmic cadence that enhances memorability and audience engagement.

Structural Cohesion: Repetition acts as a binding force, holding the thematic strands of the songs together. For example, in the song on bush burning, the repeated line *"Toho nanden ka kwagh dedoo ga"* (Bush burning is not a good thing) structures the narrative and reinforces the message.

Cultural Orality: In Tiv oral tradition, repetition is a mnemonic device. It aids in the retention and oral transmission of knowledge, ensuring that the message endures across generations.

ii. Syntax and Sentence Structure

The sentence structures in the songs tend to be simple, direct, and declarative, which is characteristic of oral narrative forms. This simplicity should not be mistaken for lack of sophistication. Rather, it reflects a functional economy of language; each phrase carries layered meanings in compact forms.

Ellipsis: Some phrases imply meaning without explicitly stating it, relying on shared cultural knowledge. For example, "though she gathers no groundnuts" implies infertility or unproductiveness, which the audience interprets through context.

Imperative and Appeal: Many lines are structured as direct appeals (e.g., "Suitor of Mbayev, do not cast her aside", "Draw nearer, Jesus").

This gives the songs an interactive tone, involving both the subject and the audience in dialogue.

iii. Lexical Choices and Cultural Signifiers

The vocabulary used in the Tiv songs is deeply rooted in the cultural context of the people. Certain words carry symbolic or layered meanings:

"Groundnuts," "soil," "bush" – These are not just natural elements but metaphors for fertility, survival, and economic life. They reflect the agrarian worldview of the Tiv people, where land and food production are central to identity.

"Shine as a wife" – The verb *shine* is metaphorical, signifying societal expectations, visibility, and success. It is not a literal glow, but a culturally coded term for marital or social performance.

"Foe," "evil one," "Jesus" – These lexical items in the spiritual song draw from Christian vocabulary but are rendered with local emotional force. They become part of the everyday spiritual lexicon of Tiv Christians, symbolising the ongoing battle between good and evil in both physical and metaphysical realms.

iv. Phonological Features

In the original Tiv versions, the sound patterns contribute significantly to the songs' aesthetic and mnemonic value:

Onomatopoeia: The opening lines "Hye, ahye! Hye, hyeee!" imitate emotional wails or cries, capturing the listener's attention. These are non-lexical vocalisations**,** often used in Tiv oral performances to express feeling beyond literal meaning.

Alliteration and Assonance: Although more prominent in English translation, sound devices such as *"suitor... set... soil... shine"* or *"burned... but... bush"* create musicality. Such features make the song pleasing to the ear and reinforce the oral poetic tradition.

Tonality (in Tiv): Tiv is a tonal language, meaning that pitch or intonation changes the meaning of a word. While this is not reflected in the English translations, it plays a major role in the original delivery, adding semantic depth and emotional colour to performance. The same word, depending on tone, could mean 'fire' or 'field,' for instance, making tone a critical linguistic feature.

v. Metaphoric and Figurative Language

Metaphor is used extensively to embed complex meanings in everyday expressions:

The *maiden who does not shine as a wife* is a metaphor for non-conformity**,** while her ability to tread the soil is a metaphor for economic participation.

The *bsurning bush without meat* becomes a metaphor for futility and unintended consequences.

The call to *Jesus to draw nearer* is a metaphor for spiritual intimacy and divine intervention**.**

These metaphors show that Tiv oral language is not flat but figuratively rich, relying on shared cultural and symbolic understanding to convey complex realities in poetic form.

vi. Oral-Aesthetic Markers

These songs exhibit typical features of oral literature:

Call and Response Structure: Particularly visible in the spiritual song, where solo lines are followed by a chorus. This structure encourages audience participation and reflects the communal nature of Tiv performance art.

Refrains: Lines that are repeated, sometimes with slight variations, create rhythm and serve to anchor the song's message. For instance, repeating “Draw nearer, Jesus” as a refrain emphasises the constancy of divine appeal.

Intonation Patterns: In oral performance, lines are delivered with rising or falling tones to indicate emotional states such as sorrow, joy, lament, or urgency. This tonal variety enhances performance aesthetics and listener engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

This study has explored the rich tradition of Tiv agricultural work songs, highlighting their critical role within Tiv farming culture. Originating from a deeply rooted agricultural society, these songs have historically served to motivate, entertain, educate, and spiritually uplift farmers as they engaged in physically strenuous labour.

Through careful analysis, it became evident that Tiv agricultural work songs are not merely functional but are richly endowed with literary and artistic elements. Their performances are highly

interactive, transforming farm labour into a communal celebration. The songs can be classified into motivational, and satirical, each serving distinct yet interconnected purposes.

Furthermore, these songs demonstrate an impressive array of literary devices such as repetition, apostrophe, symbolism, allegory, alliteration, irony parallelism, imagery, and personification, while addressing profound themes ranging from the value of labour and the redefinition of worth, environmental consciousness and communal responsibility, faith, spiritual warfare and communal redemption and oral literature as cultural memory and moral compass. Their linguistic features, including repetition and rhythm, syntax and sentence structure, lexical choices and cultural signifiers, phonological features, metaphorical and figurative language and oral-aesthetic markers, reveal a tradition that is both adaptive and resilient in the face of modern changes.

4.2 Conclusion

Tiv agricultural work songs stand as a vital, though often overlooked, component of African oral literature and cultural heritage. They reveal much about the Tiv people's relationship with the land, their communal values, their humour, and their resilience in the face of life's challenges.

As modernisation continues to alter traditional farming practices, the preservation and study of these songs become ever more critical. They offer not only historical insights but also enduring lessons on the power of community, creativity, and cultural pride.

In conclusion, Tiv agricultural work songs should not be relegated to the past. Rather, they deserve active preservation, scholarly attention, and celebration as dynamic expressions of Tiv identity and humanity’s universal need to find meaning and joy in labour.

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APENDIX A

Interview

1. Lawrence Jagba - Interviewee

APENDIX B (PICTURES)

The researcher and the interviewee

The researcher and the farmers

The farmers singing the "Kporon Kyua, Yesu" song